

The State of Underage Drinking in North Carolina

Quantitative Executive Summary

Methodology

McLaughlin & Associates conducted separate surveys among parents and students in North Carolina. A statewide survey of 500 parents of middle and high school students was conducted between July 8 and 18, 2014. A statewide survey of 300 students in middle and high school was conducted between July 10 and 28, 2014. This is a unique study with all interviews conducted by professional interviewers via telephone. All respondents both parents and students were promised confidentiality and that their individual personal responses would remain private. Prior to each student interview, the interviewer received permission from the student's parent or guardian to conduct the survey. Interview selection was at random within predetermined geographic units. These units were structured to statistically correlate with appropriate population models. The accuracy of the sample of 500 parents is within +/- 4.5% at a 95% confidence interval. The accuracy of the sample of 300 students is within +/- 5.7% at a 95% confidence interval. The survey results in this summary have been rounded and may not equal 100%.

Parent Survey Summary & Key Findings

The survey of parents of middle and high school students depicts that parents are aware of underage drinking, they think children should wait until they are older to drink alcohol and they have talked to their children about it; however, there appears to be a lack of urgency and concern. Although most have talked to their children about underage drinking, a significant percentage seem to be waiting too long to start the conversations. Even when parents do talk with their children about underage drinking, the conversations are too infrequent. Although most parents are aware that many children start drinking alcohol before the age of 15, the majority just see it as a problem, not a crisis; the plurality see underage drinking as a minor problem in their community, not a serious problem; and a little less than one in five are very concerned about their children drinking alcohol. The parents are very receptive to the underage drinking statistics and believe they are convincing reasons to do more to reduce underage drinking in North Carolina. It appears the statistics of the harmful consequences of underage drinking provide parents a greater sense of urgency, which could impact their own attitudes and the frequency and content of their conversations with their children. Only a little over one-quarter have ever researched underage drinking or ways to talk to their children about it. Among those who have done the research, they found it helpful, but it's apparent there is a need for better resources. The vast majority think it would be helpful to have a website that is dedicated to the issue of underage drinking and is a resource to equip parents with the knowledge, skills and confidence to talk with their children about underage drinking.

- On average, parents think it's appropriate to talk about alcohol abuse and underage drinking with their children when they are about 10 years old (9.7 mean age). The majority (58%)

think it's appropriate to have conversations when they are 10 years old or younger. One-third (34%) think it's appropriate to talk with their children when they are between the ages of 11 and 14, about 3% say ages 15 to 17 and 3% believe it's best to wait until their children are 18 or older.

- Nine in ten (92%) parents say they have talked about alcohol abuse and underage drinking with their middle or high school aged children.
- Among those who have talked with their children, 33% say they talk frequently, 48% sometimes and 19% rarely. If parents think underage drinking in their community is a serious problem, the conversations are more common (frequently 41%, sometimes 46% and rarely 13%) than among parents who think underage drinking in their community is only a minor problem (frequently 26%, sometimes 52% and rarely 22%). Male parents say they talk to their children frequently 29%, sometimes 49% and rarely 22% while female parents say frequently 36%, sometimes 48% and rarely 16%. Among households where adults drink regularly, the conversations are frequently 27%, sometimes 53%, and rarely 19% in comparison to households where adults never drink (frequently 41%, sometimes 41% and rarely 18%).
- A large majority (72% to 28%) have never done any research about underage drinking or ways to talk with their children about it. The percentage of parents who have done research is significantly higher among parents who frequently (42%) talk with their children about underage drinking than parents who sometimes (24%) or rarely (21%) talk with their children.
- Among the parents who have done research, 92% say the research was helpful; however, with 48% saying somewhat helpful, there is certainly room for improvement and a need for more helpful resources for parents.
- The vast majority of all parents (86%) say it would be helpful to have a website that is dedicated to the issue of underage drinking and is a resource to equip parents with the knowledge, skills and confidence to talk with their children about underage drinking. Only 11% say such a website wouldn't be helpful. A slight majority (51%) think it would be "very" helpful.
- Although 4 in 5 (84%) think underage drinking in their community is a problem, the plurality (47%) think it's only a minor problem. Over one-third (37%) see it as a serious problem and 10% don't think it's a problem at all. Female parents are more likely to see underage drinking as a serious problem than male parents (44% to 28%). By where they live, the percentage who say it is a serious problem is highest among parents in urban areas (43%) followed by rural areas (38%) and suburban areas (32%).

- Although 84% think underage drinking in their community is a problem, a smaller majority (64%) are concerned that their children will drink alcohol. The plurality (46%) are only somewhat concerned and 18% are very concerned. Among parents who think underage drinking in their community is a serious problem, 27% are very concerned, 53% somewhat concerned and 19% are not concerned at all about their children drinking alcohol. Among parents who believe underage drinking in the community is a minor problem, 11% are very concerned, 48% somewhat concerned and 41% are not concerned at all about their children drinking alcohol. Parents who only have boys are more concerned (21% very, 49% somewhat and 30% not at all) about their children drinking than parents who only have girls (14% very, 42% somewhat and 43% not at all). There is higher concern in urban (18% very, 55% somewhat and 28% not at all) and rural areas (20% very, 44% somewhat and 35% not at all) than suburban areas (7% very, 47% somewhat and 45% not at all). The total level of concern is lower among African-American parents than White parents (56% to 66%); however, the very concern is greater among African-Americans than Whites (28% to 14%). The total and intensity of the concern is bigger among female parents (22% very, 45% somewhat and 33% not at all) than male parents (12% very, 48% somewhat and 40% not at all).
- The majority (55%) of parents think friends and peers have the most influence on minors and whether or not they drink alcohol. A little over one-third (35%) think parents have the most influence, 8% say the media and 1% cite the school system. The results are similar regardless among parents who frequently (55% friends/34% parents), sometimes (56% friends/33% parents) or rarely (55% friends/38% parents) talk to their children about underage drinking. By a 2 to 1 ratio (61% to 30%), the majority of parents who only have boys think friends and peers have more influence than parents. Among parents of girls only, the gap is very narrow (47% friends/peers to 43% parents). By a 2 to 1 ratio (62% to 30%), the majority of female parents believe friends and peers have more influence than parents. By a slight margin (45% to 42%), male parents think friends and peers have more influence than parents.
- On average, parents think the appropriate age for their children to try an alcoholic drink is about 20 years old (19.6 mean age). The majority (60%) think their child should be 21 years old before having an alcoholic drink. With 15% refusing to answer the question, 26% think it's okay to try an alcoholic beverage before the legal age (4% at 14/younger, 6% between 15 and 17 and 16% between 18 and 21). In households where adults drink regularly, the average age when they think it's appropriate to try an alcoholic drink is 19 years old. In households where adults never drink, the average age response is virtually 21 years old. A larger majority of female parents than male parents (64% to 55%) think their children should wait until 21 years old before having an alcoholic drink. On average, male parents think the age should be 19 years old and female parents say 20 years old.
- Nine in ten (89%) parents say they are aware that many children start drinking alcohol before the age of 15. Over one-third (38%) think it's a crisis. The majority (57%) believe it's a problem but not a crisis and 4% don't see it as a problem at all. The crisis level is 55% if

parents are very concerned about their children drinking alcohol, 37% if somewhat concerned and 30% if not concerned at all. In households where adults regularly drink, the crisis level is 28%. In households where adults never drink, the majority (55%) says children drinking alcohol before the age of 15 is a crisis. The crisis percentage is relatively close whether they have children 14/under (37%) or 15/older (41%). Among male parents the crisis percentage is 34% in comparison to 40% among female parents.

- Not including injury or death, the consequences of underage drinking that concern parents the most are drug use (31%) and unintended sexual activity (26%) followed by health problems (13%) and academic problems (13%). Among parents of children 14 years old and younger, drug use and unintended sexual activity are essentially tied (29% and 28% respectively). Among parents of children 15 years of age or older, drug use is a higher concern than unintended sexual activity (39% to 20%). If they only have boys, drug use is above unintended sexual activity (35% to 23%). Conversely, if they only have girls, unintended sexual activity is above drug use (34% to 25%). If they have boys and girls, drug use is 35% and unintended sexual activity is 21%. Male parents are more concerned about drug use (30% to 20%) while female parents are divided (31% drug use to 29% unintended sexual activity).

Nine in ten (92%) agree that the age range between 11 and 18 is an impressionable period when youth are especially susceptible to outside influences such as peers, family members, and the media. More than three-quarters (78%) strongly agree. The majority (62%) believe parents often do not feel fully prepared with the information or resources they need to properly address underage drinking with their children. A little over one-quarter (28%) strongly agree. The agreement level is higher among parents with children 14 and younger than 15 and older; stronger among African-American parents than White parents; and bigger among female parents than male parents.

AGREE/DISAGREE (strongly agree)	Total	Child 14/Und	Child 15/Old	White	Afr-Am	Men	Women
The age range between 11 and 18 is an impressionable period when youth are especially susceptible to outside influences such as peers, family members, and the media.	92/7 (78)	91/8 (77)	93/6 (78)	95/5 (82)	84/72 (72)	92/7 (77)	92/8 (78)
Parents often do not feel fully prepared with the information or resources they need to properly address underage drinking with their children.	62/34 (28)	65/32 (29)	58/39 (28)	61/36 (26)	69/29 (43)	59/38 (26)	65/32 (30)

Nine in ten parents (91%) disagree that underage drinking is okay as long as they don't drive or as long as it's done in moderation. Four in five strongly disagree (83% and 79% respectively). The disagreement levels are both high and intense among the various parent segments. The level of disagreement is not as high or intense when asked about whether underage drinking is okay as long as it's done at home with parental supervision. Four in five (82%) disagree with the statement and 70% strongly disagree. Three-quarters (75%) disagree that we all drank when we were underage—it's considered a rite of passage. Although the majority (56%) strongly disagrees, the intensity level is significantly smaller than the reactions to the previous statements.

AGREE/DISAGREE (strongly disagree)	Total	Child 14/Und	Child 15/Old	White	Afr-Am	Men	Women
Underage drinking is okay as long as they don't drive.	8/91 (83)	7/92 (83)	11/88 (83)	9/91 (80)	6/92 (90)	9/90 (81)	8/92 (85)
Underage drinking is okay as long as it's done in moderation.	8/91 (79)	8/91 (79)	7/92 (79)	9/91 (76)	7/93 (89)	10/90 (74)	7/92 (82)
Underage drinking is okay as long as it's done at home with parental supervision.	16/82 (70)	14/84 (72)	19/81 (69)	16/83 (68)	18/79 (76)	20/78 (64)	13/85 (74)
We all drank when we were underage—it's considered a rite of passage.	23/75 (56)	23/76 (55)	23/76 (58)	23/75 (51)	25/74 (72)	26/72 (52)	21/78 (59)

- Nine in ten (92%) parents say they are aware that adults who host a gathering on their property where they knowingly serve alcohol to minors can be prosecuted in criminal proceedings by the state and receive a fine or jail time.

The vast majority of parents found all of the reasons to do more to reduce underage drinking convincing. Considering only 33% frequently talk to their children about underage drinking, only 28% have researched underage drinking, only 37% consider underage drinking a serious problem in their community and only 18% are very concerned that their child will drink alcohol, the overwhelming results from this message section suggest parents may not be fully aware of these statistics. The most convincing statistics are the deaths caused by underage drinking and driving; violent crimes and risky sex linked to underage drinking; and more deaths being caused by underage drinking than all other illegal drugs combined. Nine in ten parents think those statistics are convincing and clear majorities find the statistics to be very convincing. The second tier of convincing messages includes these: 34% of all high school students in North Carolina drank alcohol in the last 30 days and 44% of eight graders have had alcohol at least once. The total convincing percentages are nearly as big as the previous messages, but their intensity levels are not as high. Four in five find the fact that underage drinking costs North Carolina \$1.5 billion annually to be a convincing argument to do more to reduce underage drinking. The very convincing percentage for this message is significantly lower than the previous percentages.

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CONVINCING/NOT CONVINCING (very convincing)	Total	Child 14/Und	Child 15/Old	White	Afr-Am	Men	Women
In North Carolina a child dies every week as a result of underage drinking and driving.	93/6 (72)	93/7 (71)	95/5 (73)	94/6 (72)	93/5 (73)	92/7 (71)	94/5 (72)
In 2009, underage drinking led to 26,800 violent crimes, 67,400 property crimes and over 30,000 teens have risky sex and 737 teen pregnancies.	92/6 (66)	92/7 (65)	93/6 (68)	92/7 (63)	94/4 (74)	90/7 (65)	93/6 (67)
Nationally, more teens die as a result of alcohol than all other illegal drugs combined.	91/8 (62)	90/9 (62)	93/7 (68)	91/9 (61)	93/5 (63)	90/8 (63)	91/8 (62)
Thirty-four percent of all high school students in North Carolina drank alcohol in the last 30 days.	88/11 (54)	88/11 (53)	89/11 (54)	87/12 (50)	88/10 (64)	85/13 (51)	90/10 (55)
Forty-four percent of eighth graders have had alcohol at least once.	85/13 (51)	86/11 (52)	84/16 (53)	84/14 (47)	90/8 (66)	85/11 (46)	85/13 (55)
Underage drinking costs North Carolina \$1.5 billion annually.	79/17 (43)	80/18 (41)	78/19 (44)	79/18 (40)	84/14 (55)	77/19 (39)	81/16 (81)

Student Survey Summary & Key Findings

The student survey highlights the pervasiveness of underage drinking, which parents seem to be underestimating. Overall, the majority of students know people around their age who have tried alcohol. One-third of middle school students know people their age who have tried alcohol. In high school 4 out of 5 students know people their age who have tried alcohol. The plurality of those who have had alcohol first tried it when they were in middle school. Over one-third of middle school students and the majority of high school students who have tried alcohol are drinking it regularly, at least once a month. As seen in the parent survey, most students have talked with their parents about alcohol, but it's infrequent. Although students can be embarrassed or afraid to talk to their parents about alcohol, most students believe parents can help stop underage drinking by talking with children more about alcohol and the dangers of underage drinking. The survey results make it clear that parents need to be able to communicate with their children in a manner that is welcoming and encourages them to initiate conversations as well as provide their children with the confidence and knowledge to withstand peer pressure. A parent just telling his or her children to say no to alcohol or wait to drink until they're older isn't good enough. The survey illustrates that parents must tell their children why underage drinking is bad and dangerous. The students were receptive to all of the statistics and messages against underage drinking, and believe they are convincing reasons to stop underage drinking.

- The majority (54%) of students know people around their age who have talked about drinking alcohol. About one-quarter (24%) of middle school students and 71% of high school students know people around their age who have talked about drinking alcohol. The first big percentage jump is from seventh grade (13%) to eighth grade (37%) then ninth grade (46%) to tenth grade (76%). Four in five eleventh through twelfth graders know people around their age who have talked about alcohol.
- Overall, one-third (34%) say they know more people around their age who think it's okay to drink alcohol. Three in five (62%) know more people who think it's not okay to drink alcohol. Among middle school students, 8% say more people think it's okay to drink alcohol. Among high school students, the percentage increases to 48%. The big differences by grade are eighth grade (12%) to ninth grade (25%) and then ninth grade (25%) to tenth grade (59%). The majority of tenth through twelfth graders say more people around their age think it's okay to drink alcohol.
- Nearly two-thirds (64%) know people around their age who have tried alcohol. One-third (33%) of middle school students and 81% of high school students know people around their age who have tried alcohol. The percentages spike between seventh grade (24%), eighth grade (45%), ninth grade (60%) and tenth grade (84%). By the time students are seniors in high school, 96% know people around their age who have tried alcohol. One-third of boys (34%) and girls (33%) in middle school know people around their age who have tried alcohol; however, there is a gender gap in high school where the percentage is 74% among boys and 88% among girls.

- Among those who know people around their age who have tried alcohol, the average age that most first tried alcohol is 14 years old (13.9 mean age). A slight plurality (40%) say ages 11 through 14 and 34% say 15 through 17. At opposite ends of the spectrum, 5% say 10 years or younger and 2% say 18 years or older (20% say don't know/refuse). The average age that middle school students cite is about 13 years old (12.6 mean age), and it's 14 years old (14.2 mean age) among high school students.
- Among those who know people around their age who have tried alcohol, the majority (54%) say they drink once or more a month. One-quarter (25%) say at least once a week and 29% say at least once a month. An additional quarter (26%) say they drink less than once a month and 21% don't know or refused to answer. Drinking at least once a month is 36% among middle school students and 58% among high school students. The drinking at least once a week is 17% among middle school students and 26% among high school students. The sample sizes by individual grades are small for this sub-population, but they suggest a significant increase in the frequency of drinking among students in the tenth through twelfth grades.
- Although the majority (56%) say it would be hard for them or people their age to get alcohol, roughly 2 in 5 (38%) say it would be easy. Virtually one in five (19%) middle school students and approximately half (49%) of high school students say it would be easy to get alcohol. Tenth through twelfth graders are more likely to say it would be easy to get alcohol. There is a gender gap among high school students. More high school girls say it's easier than boys (56% to 41%).
- Although 81% say their parents have talked to them about drinking alcohol, the majority (58%) say it's only sometimes. A little less than one-quarter (23%) say they talk a lot and 18% say their parents have never talked to them about alcohol. As seen in the parent survey, the conversations about underage drinking between parent and children are infrequent. Among middle school students, the amount of talking is 20% a lot, 53% sometimes and 26% never. Among high school students, the results are 24% a lot, 60% sometimes and 14% never. The percentage of parents who talk to their children about underage drinking goes up from 66% among sixth and seventh graders to 83% among eighth graders; however, the frequency level doesn't significantly increase with it.
- The top verbatim responses to "what is the biggest thing your parents tell you about drinking alcohol?" are: "don't do it" (29%), "wait/when you're older" (11%), "dangerous/bad things" (9%), "bad life choices" (6%), "don't drink and drive" (5%), "not good" (4%), "death" (3%), "health concerns" (3%), "be safe/good choices" (2%), "moderation" (1%), "addictive/alcoholism" (1%), "illegal" (1%), "do it at home/controlled" (1%), "sex/lose inhibitions" (1%) and "alcohol poisoning" (1%).
- The majority (55%) think most people their age are embarrassed or afraid to talk to their parents about alcohol. The majority is about the same among middle (55%) and high school

(56%) students. The percentage was higher among high school boys (61%) than girls (50%). It's apparent that parents not only need to know what to say but how to say it in a manner that creates a welcoming atmosphere to talk with their children and also encourages their children to initiate conversations.

- The vast majority (87%) of students consider underage drinking a problem. The majority (58%) think it's a big problem. Less than one-third (29%) consider it a small problem. It seems students might see underage drinking as a bigger problem than parents. In the parent survey, 84% think underage drinking is a problem in their community, but only 37% say it's a serious problem and 47% consider it a minor problem. Among middle school students, 85% say underage drinking is a problem with 65% saying big problem and 20% saying small problem. Among high school students, 88% say underage drinking is a problem with 54% saying big problem and 34% saying small problem.
- Almost unanimously (99%), students feel it is dangerous for people their age to drink alcohol. Three-quarters (76%) say it's very dangerous. Middle school students (88% very dangerous) think it's more dangerous than high school students (70% very dangerous). The very dangerous percentage slopes down from 97% among sixth graders to 59% among twelfth graders.
- The top verbatim responses to "what's the most dangerous thing that can happen to people your age who drink alcohol?" are: "drunk driving/crash" (33%), "death" (25%), "impaired judgment" (8%), "alcohol poisoning" (8%), "addiction/alcoholism" (4%), "brain damage" (3%), "general health problems" (3%), "lose your mind" (2%), "hurt people" (2%), "leads to cancer" (2%), "liver disease" (1%), "kidney damage" (1%), and "get arrested" (1%).
- Among a list of choices, the majority (56%) think most people their age drink because they want to fit in or be accepted by their friends or peers. One in five (22%) says to have a good time followed by they are sad or depressed and want to feel better about themselves (8%), they wish to rebel and defy their parents, teachers and other adult authorities (5%), and they are bored (2%). By far and away, wanting to fit in or be accepted by their friends or peers was the top choice (61%) among middle school students. Among high school students, a slight majority (53%) say they want to fit in or be accepted, but 31% say they want to have a good time. The desire to fit in or be accepted is stronger among high school girls (57%) than boys (48%).

Four in five (84%) students feel parents talking more to their children about alcohol and the dangers of underage drinking would help stop underage drinking. Nearly all (96%) middle school students and 78% of high school students concur. These results underscore the findings from the parent survey, which highlight the need for parents to talk more frequently with their children about alcohol and the dangers of underage drinking. Four in five (80%) think police being tougher on underage drinking would help stop it. The sentiment is stronger among middle school students than high school students; stronger among girls than boys and stronger among White students than African-American students. A clear majority (71%) believe schools

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spending more time teaching students about alcohol and the dangers of underage drinking would help stop underage drinking. Middle school students are at a much higher level of agreement than high school students.

Help Stop Underage Drinking YES/NO	Total	Middle School	High School	White	Afr-Am	Boys	Girls
Parents talking more to their children about alcohol and the dangers of underage drinking.	84/15	96/4	78/21	86/13	80/20	85/15	84/16
Police being tougher on underage drinking.	80/18	86/14	77/21	85/14	57/38	78/21	82/16
Schools spending more time teaching students about alcohol and the dangers of underage drinking.	71/29	89/11	62/38	72/28	70/30	72/28	70/30

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At least 4 in 5 students think each of the tested messages is a convincing reason to stop underage drinking. As mentioned earlier, the top responses to what is the biggest thing their parents tell them about drinking alcohol are “don’t do it” and “wait/when you’re older.” It’s clear that just telling children to say no or wait isn’t good enough. Parents need to be equipped with these persuasive statistics and messages in order to make a meaningful impact on their children’s attitudes and behavior.

Convincing Reason to Stop Underage Drinking - YES/NO	Total	Middle School	High School	White	Afr-Am	Boys	Girls
In 2009, underage drinking led to 60 murders; 26,800 violent crimes such as rape, robbery and assault; and 67,400 property crimes including burglary and car theft.	94/5	95/5	94/5	95/4	90/10	93/7	96/4
In North Carolina a child dies every week as a result of underage drinking and driving.	91/9	93/7	90/7	94/6	80/20	91/8	91/9
Drinking alcohol causes teenagers to do risky things that they will regret when they are sober.	91/9	96/4	88/12	90/6	93/7	93/7	89/11
Teenagers who drink alcohol are more likely to have health issues such as depression and anxiety disorders.	89/11	95/5	86/14	89/11	87/13	91/9	87/13
More teens die as a result of alcohol than all other illegal drugs combined.	88/12	88/11	88/12	88/12	88/13	88/12	89/11
Teenagers who use alcohol have higher rates of academic problems and poor school performance compared to non-drinkers.	79/21	90/10	73/27	82/18	68/32	81/19	77/23
If you use a fake ID to purchase alcohol underage, you lose your driver’s license for a year.	80/19	79/20	80/18	81/18	75/22	76/21	84/16

There definitely needs to be a social media component to any campaign against underage drinking. Four in five (79%) parents use social media, in particular Facebook (58%). Most students, especially high school students, are using social media. Instagram, Facebook and YouTube are the primary social media hubs for students. Twitter should be included when targeting high school students.

	Parents	Middle School Students	High School Students
Use Social Media	79	81	93
Facebook	58	16	24
YouTube	8	28	16
Linked-In	3	0	0
Twitter	3	1	12
Instagram	3	34	36
Pinterest	2	1	1
Tumblr	0	0	3
Other	1	1	0
Don't Use Social Media	15	16	5
Don't Use Internet	6	3	0
Don't Know/Refused	2	1	2